



# Inver Grove Heights Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

Wednesday, May 13, 2026 at 7:00 PM

8150 Barbara Avenue, Inver Grove Heights, MN 55077

## AGENDA

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Roll Call**
3. **Presentations**
  - A. Commissioner Appreciation — Abby Heidenreich
  - B. Community Center Membership & Admissions — Jamie Muscha, Community Center Manager
4. **Announcements**
  - A. June Meeting — Wednesday, June 10, 2026, at 7:00pm
  - B. Heritage Village Park Inclusive Playground and Splash Pad — Grand Opening Celebration Wednesday, June 17, 2026, 6:00pm – 7:30pm
  - C. Commission Park Tour, July 8, 2026 — No Regular July Meeting
5. **Consent Agenda**

All items on the Consent Agenda are considered routine and have been made available to the Commission at least two days prior to the meeting; the items will be enacted in one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Commission member or citizen so requests, in which event the item will be removed from this Agenda and considered in normal sequence.

  - A. Approval of Agenda
  - B. Approval of Meeting Minutes from April 8, 2026
6. **Public Comment**

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the Commission on items that are not on the agenda. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes per person.
7. **Unfinished Business**

Items that are brought back to the Commission for action from a previous meeting
8. **Regular Agenda**
9. **Administrative Presentations**
  - A. Recreation Superintendent Update
  - B. Parks Superintendent Update
  - C. Parks and Recreation Director Update
10. **Commission Comments**
11. **Adjourn**

# May 13, 2026 - Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee Agenda

**Inver Grove Heights  
Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission  
City Hall Council Chambers - 8150 Barbara Avenue  
Wednesday, April 8, 2026 - 7:00 p.m.**

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Cook called the April 8, 2026, Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL:**

**Present:** Chair Steve Cook; Commissioners: Luisa Torres, Sandy Christensen, Niki Barker, Kurt Stangler, Tracy Mulcahy, Abby Heidenreich, William Skar

**Absent:** Lukas Johnson,

**Others Present:** Parks and Recreation Director Adam Lares, Parks Superintendent Brian Swoboda, Recreation Superintendent Julie Dorshak

**3. PRESENTATIONS:**

There was none.

**4. ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

- A. The March meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 13, at 7:00 p.m.
- B. Commissioners up for reappointment and members of the public were reminded that the application deadline is May 4th; the commission was noted as an important body handling key city projects and issues, and interested individuals are encouraged to apply.
- C. Heritage Village Park Inclusive Playground and Splash Pad grand opening will be held on Wednesday, June 17, 2026, from 6:00–7:30 p.m.

**5. CONSENT AGENDA:**

- A. Approval of Agenda
- D. Approval of Meeting Minutes from March 11, 2026

**Motion by Commissioner Christensen, Second by Barker to approve the March 11 Minutes and the Consent Agenda.**

**Ayes: 8**

**Nays: 0      Motion carried.**

**6. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

There was none.

**7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

There was no unfinished business.

**8. REGULAR AGENDA:**

- A. **Lighting Policy – Rock Island Swing Bridge**

Parks and Recreation Director Lares reported that the bridge lighting project was completed and opened to the community last year, with lighting currently managed by staff. As no formal policy exists, he requested commission input on general themes to guide development of a high-level lighting policy, noting that examples from other communities may be used as a reference.

The purpose of the discussion is to guide future lighting decisions for the bridge and surrounding facility, with an emphasis on gathering input from the commission, many of whom have been involved with the project since its inception.

Consideration was given to the overall vision and purpose of the lighting. While the project originally focused on functional lighting improvements for the trailhead and park, the bridge has become a key landmark and symbol of community identity. Its historical role in connecting communities and serving as a regional thoroughfare was noted, along with the sense of community pride it represents. Input was requested on whether the lighting should highlight history, recognize specific events, enhance the user experience, or reflect the City's identity as a river community.

Commissioner Skar suggested using the bridge more actively as a community space, proposing events like dancing or movie nights enhanced by the lighting, and emphasizing greater use of the bridge now that lighting is in place.

Commissioner Heidenreich asked about the capacity of the bridge.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares stated that there is no official capacity established for the bridge, though its size suggests it can accommodate a significant number of people, and staff can look further into this. He noted that capacity would likely be guided by the type of event and managed through programming limits, such as registration caps, to avoid overcrowding. Events would be planned based on practical bandwidth rather than a fixed occupancy, with consideration given to how the space is used, including controlled activities like dances or silent disco-style events, as well as broader uses like movies or concerts that may extend beyond the bridge area.

Chair Cook asked whether the proposed lighting policy should include opportunities for public requests and input on lighting for events, both private and public, or if it is intended to focus primarily on how the City will manage the lighting.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares responded that both approaches are being considered, including whether to allow community requests for lighting as well as how the City would manage scheduling and set parameters. He noted that if public requests are permitted, the policy would need to address both City-led programming and community-driven requests operating together.

Commissioner Stangler asked whether there have been any problems or complaints since the lighting was implemented.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares reported that there have been no complaints regarding brightness or lighting impacts since installation, noting the design keeps most lighting directed downward within the space. Minor issues have included occasional technology resets and a vandalism incident shortly after opening, which was mitigated by protective equipment. Overall,

feedback has been positive, with some requests received from individuals or groups for specific lighting colors or displays, highlighting the need for policy guidance.

Commissioner Stangler asked whether any of the lighting requests received to date have been honored.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares confirmed that no public lighting requests have been honored to date, with current lighting limited to City-led displays that showcase the system's capabilities. He noted that these include general, non-controversial themes such as red, white, and blue for the Fourth of July, along with scheduled dynamic and static lighting displays running in 15-minute intervals from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m.

Chair Cook noted that while the Eagan lighting policy provided was helpful, it appeared incomplete and suggested reviewing additional information on their website. He also referenced the I-35W bridge lighting as another example, highlighting the importance of understanding how other communities manage lighting decisions and public input to help guide policy development.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares stated that staff plan to explore how other entities, such as the State of Minnesota or possibly the City of Minneapolis, manage bridge lighting policies, noting uncertainty about jurisdiction. He added that while other bridges often use simpler, static lighting, this system allows for significantly more dynamic and versatile lighting options.

Commissioner Torres suggested using the bridge for events such as a neon-themed 5K and other light-based activities, and proposed water-related options like guided moonlight kayaking, while also asking how the lighting schedule adjusts seasonally.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares explained that lighting hours shift seasonally from Memorial Day to Labor Day to align with later sunsets, while still starting earlier in the evening to ensure families can experience the lighting without needing to stay out late.

Commissioner Barker asked whether the information from Eagan was obtained through research or direct communication, and whether they experienced any pushback after implementing their policy.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares stated that he has spoken with staff in Eagan and reviewed their detailed website, noting their policy includes a full, pre-approved annual calendar that limits opportunities for additional requests. He explained that some requests cannot be accommodated due to scheduling conflicts, highlighting the need to consider how much flexibility to allow, whether to maintain a set calendar, and how to manage and prioritize requests. He emphasized that while Eagan's approach can serve as a reference, the city will need to determine its own process, including how decisions are made and what requests are accepted, with the understanding that the policy can evolve over time since it is not an ordinance.

Commissioner Torres commented that the example calendar appears very busy and asked whether staff would recommend starting with a smaller number of holidays and expanding over time rather than implementing a full schedule immediately.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares noted that there are multiple approaches to developing a lighting calendar, including starting with recognized national holidays and assigning simple color themes, while leaving other dates open for staff-selected or community-focused events. He

added that the City could also consider incorporating locally relevant or widely recognized observances, with further discussion needed to determine the preferred approach.

Commissioner Torres asked whether there is a fee associated with submitting special lighting requests.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares introduced discussion on default lighting, requesting input on base colors, seasonal themes, or other standards when no special lighting is scheduled, and noted that safety lighting will remain after 10:00 p.m.

Commissioner Torres asked whether an environmental study was conducted to assess impacts on wildlife prior to installation.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares responded that no formal study was completed, though the DNR was consulted and had no concerns, and noted any environmental impact is minimal compared to surrounding lighting.

Commissioner Barker expressed support for a seasonal lighting approach.

Chair Cook suggested that these topics could be further explored in a subcommittee or work session.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares clarified that the current discussion is for general feedback to guide a draft policy, with more detailed review to follow in future meetings.

Commissioner Skar supported seasonal or quarterly lighting themes and asked about lighting usage and potential energy savings if only interior lighting were used.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares stated that operating costs have only slightly increased, and that limiting lighting would result in minimal savings, noting that the lighting enhances the bridge's visual appeal and serves as a community attraction, with both interior and exterior lighting providing the best effect.

Chair Cook asked about the visual difference when exterior lighting is turned off.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares explained that turning off exterior lighting reduces visibility of the historic structure while interior lighting maintains the pedestrian experience, noting that cost savings would be minimal. He outlined considerations for the lighting schedule, including timing, duration, and weekday versus weekend use, and explained that the current schedule runs from dusk until about 10:00 p.m., after which the system switches to static safety lighting, and asked whether a standard safety color would be preferred.

All commissioners expressed support for maintaining both interior and exterior lighting.

Chair Cook asked whether the 10:00 p.m. cutoff was based on the closing time of Swing Bridge Park and whether extending lighting later, such as to 11:00 p.m., would make sense given park hours.

Commissioner Torres expressed concern about running lighting all night, citing light pollution and potential impacts on wildlife along the Mississippi River. She suggested that certain colors, such as red, may be less disruptive and still serve safety purposes, though she acknowledged further research would be needed.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares responded that safety lighting is important for visibility, particularly for police response after park hours. He asked whether the group preferred a more traditional, amber-toned light to signal that shows have ended, and whether only interior lighting should remain on after 10:00 p.m.

Commissioner Torres suggested keeping interior lighting on at a lower brightness for safety, while using a standard red light externally, like other structures, to align with public expectations.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares clarified that the system currently spaces lighting to replicate previous conditions while conserving energy, noting that color choice does not significantly impact energy use but that the key decision is what static lighting should be used after 10:00 p.m.

Chair Cook emphasized that lighting should be sufficient for visibility so individuals can safely navigate the area if present.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares reiterated that the intent is not to encourage use after hours but to maintain safety.

Commissioner Mulcahy supported having a distinct “off” or neutral lighting state to signal that light shows have concluded and the park is closed.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares agreed and suggested a traditional amber or soft white tone to indicate that transition. He also noted the system’s ability to adjust lighting during events such as mayfly season to reduce attraction to lights and asked about prior experiences.

Parks Superintendent Swoboda reported that mayfly activity had been less severe in the past year, with only minor impacts, and confirmed that the system has the capability to adjust lighting as needed.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares summarized that the group appeared aligned with shutting off show lighting at 10:00 p.m., maintaining safety lighting overnight, and continuing daily operations. He outlined a potential annual approval process for lighting schedules, beginning with Commission review and followed by City Council approval.

Chair Cook asked whether special lighting requests would need to follow the annual approval cycle or if requests could be made throughout the year.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares explained that annual requests could be submitted in advance, but there would still be an opportunity for additional requests if dates remain open, typically with a processing window of approximately 30 days.

Commissioner Barker noted that such requests would not automatically repeat annually and would need to be resubmitted.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares confirmed that requests would need to be renewed each year to allow flexibility and availability for others and asked whether the group preferred starting with a limited approach to holiday recognition, such as focusing only on federal holidays.

Commissioner Barker expressed concern about including religious holidays due to potential fairness and inclusivity issues and recommended aligning lighting recognition with holidays officially observed by the City to ensure a clear and consistent framework.

Commissioner Stangler noted that federally recognized holidays provide a clear and straightforward standard, while broader observances could introduce complexity.

Chair Cook added that observances beyond official holidays may become more challenging to manage due to varying interests.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares clarified that not all federal holidays are observed by the City and asked whether the group preferred focusing specifically on City-recognized federal holidays.

Commissioner Skar added that starting with a limited framework allows for future adjustments as additional requests or considerations arise.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares raised the possibility of including community events, such as Inver Grove Heights Days or City-led programming, as part of the lighting schedule.

Commissioner Skar asked what other community events might qualify beyond major local celebrations.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares explained that City-led or officially partnered events could be included, while other groups, such as local organizations or schools, may need to submit formal requests.

Commissioner Stangler noted that certain events, such as major sports victories, may require immediate recognition and would not fit within a standard request timeline.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares suggested allowing some administrative flexibility for City leadership to authorize immediate lighting changes when appropriate, while balancing existing scheduled recognitions.

Commissioner Barker asked whether multiple recognitions could be accommodated within the same evening.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares confirmed that the system allows for schedule adjustments within a single night if needed.

Commissioner Mulcahy suggested that time blocks could potentially be divided among different requests.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares cautioned that such flexibility would likely be limited to City-led programming rather than public requests.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares outlined considerations for community lighting requests, including eligibility, application limits, and potential fees. He referenced a neighboring city's process, noting that requests are treated as a privilege rather than a right, require a formal application, and do not guarantee approval or feedback on decisions. He explained that their policy does not allow automatic renewals and excludes overly religious, political, personal, or commercial requests. Applications must be submitted at least 30 days in advance, with city staff providing notification within approximately 14 days. Previously approved annual events take priority over new requests, and approvals are typically limited to one night. While multiple applications may be submitted, only one request per individual or organization is allowed per

year. He asked the group for their initial thoughts on the request process and what elements they supported or wished to explore further.

Commissioner Christensen suggested that applicants who received approval in a prior year should not be automatically prioritized in subsequent years. She recommended a system that gives others an opportunity for the same date, potentially through a point-based approach or tracking prior approvals to ensure fairness and prevent the same individual or organization from receiving the same date each year.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares asked whether a request system should operate on a first-come, first-served basis or if applicants who previously received approval should be deprioritized. He noted the need to consider timing and staff capacity, particularly when determining how long to hold a date before releasing it if no other requests are submitted.

Commissioner Christensen suggested that timelines would depend on the established deadlines, noting that if requests must be submitted at least 30 days in advance, availability could be determined after that window.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares clarified that the policy requires requests to be submitted a minimum of 30 days in advance, with responses provided within 14 days, and asked how that timing would align with broader scheduling.

Commissioner Stangler noted that annual events are predictable and would likely be submitted at the same time each year, reducing conflicts. He added that fees could help limit excessive or unnecessary requests and expressed support for including them.

Commissioner Barker suggested differentiating between recurring observances, such as awareness months, and one-time personal requests. She proposed that permanent or recurring observances could be treated differently than individual requests, particularly when multiple parties request the same date.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares explained that allowing too many recurring approvals could significantly limit availability over time. He noted that tracking past approvals could help ensure fairness, but conflicts would still arise when multiple applicants request the same date for different purposes. He indicated that a first-come, first-served approach may be the most equitable starting point, while acknowledging potential complications.

Commissioner Christensen suggested opening requests on a rolling basis, such as allowing submissions six months in advance at a designated time, rather than scheduling an entire year at once.

Commissioner Skar asked whether requests would be for planned annual scheduling or more short-term requests for upcoming events, seeking clarification on how the system would function.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares explained that the City could establish an annual schedule for recognized holidays and City events, while allowing additional requests on a rolling basis with a 30-day advance requirement. He noted that only early-year dates might be included in the initial approval cycle.

Commissioner Skar supported a first-come, first-served approach to avoid subjective decision-making about the importance of events.

Commissioner Stangler recommended maintaining a set annual schedule for known holidays and events, with remaining open dates filled through a first-come, first-served online request system.

Commissioner Skar suggested including a disclaimer allowing the Parks and Recreation Department to modify the schedule at its discretion, particularly for significant events.

Commissioner Mulcahy asked whether the policy could be revised in the future if needed.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares confirmed that the policy would serve as a foundational framework that could evolve over time, noting that the lighting program is intended to create an interactive experience that may develop differently as usage and demand become clearer.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares discussed staff support for implementing fees, noting they would not be intended to generate revenue but could instead be directed to the City's scholarship fund.

Commissioner Christensen cautioned that many applicants, particularly nonprofits, may request fee waivers. She emphasized the importance of a firm, consistent policy requiring all applicants to pay the fee without exceptions.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares agreed, stating that nonprofits would still be required to pay the fee, as they already budget for other expenses. He noted that while fees would apply, they would be tax-exempt.

Commissioner Torres asked for clarification about the scholarship fund.

Recreation Superintendent Dorshak explained that the scholarship fund is supported through donations, including a significant contribution from the American Legion, as well as proceeds from annual t-shirt sales. The fund provides up to approximately \$200 per year for youth (up to age 17) to participate in Parks and Recreation programming.

Commissioner Skar suggested keeping the fee modest, around \$50, to ensure applicants have some investment in their request and to discourage frivolous submissions.

Chair Cook added that a fee would help limit the number of applications and ensure requests are more intentional.

Commissioner Barker clarified that the fee should only be charged upon approval, not at the time of application.

Commissioner Stangler asked whether the fee would be refundable if a request is denied.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares confirmed the fee would be refundable and noted that refunds could also be issued in the event of technical issues with the lighting display. He added that the fee could serve as a meaningful contribution to youth and family programming while encouraging more intentional and thoughtful requests.

Commissioner Torres asked specifically what Eagan charges and whether the fee is per night.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares asked whether there should be any restrictions on who is eligible to apply, assuming they are willing to pay the fee, and noted that such considerations could be incorporated into a draft policy for further review.

Commissioner Torres noted that eligibility may depend on policy language, such as excluding strongly political or religious requests.

Commissioner Heidenreich asked whether eligibility would include both residents and non-residents.

Commissioner Skar supported allowing non-residents to apply, noting that events such as weddings or other gatherings could draw participants from outside the community and still benefit the space.

Commissioner Christensen suggested charging a higher fee for non-residents.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares agreed that a tiered fee structure could be implemented, suggesting \$100 for non-residents, and raised the question of whether businesses should also pay a higher fee, noting that commercial entities may use the lighting for branding or promotional purposes. He suggested distinguishing between individual and business applicants, like practices in Egan, and proposed keeping the structure simple with a \$50 fee for residents and \$100 for non-residents or businesses.

All Commissioners agreed to establish a fee structure of \$50 for residents and \$100 for non-residents and businesses.

Parks Superintendent Swoboda suggested considering how lighting requests might interact with shelter rentals at the site, noting that groups hosting events may also rent nearby facilities.

Commissioner Heidenreich questioned whether people would use the shelter late enough to align with lighting events.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares noted that in spring and fall, earlier darkness makes evening use more feasible, and while winter use may be limited, the lighting feature would still be active.

Chair Cook asked whether shelter rentals include restroom access and who manages those facilities, and whether coordination would be needed for groups renting the shelter.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares clarified that restrooms are located at the trailhead and managed by the County and explained that they are automated and close at 10:00 p.m., aligning with park hours, noting that evening rentals could complement lighting events and be used for small gatherings or celebrations timed with the lighting display.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares asked whether requests should be limited to one per year or remain unlimited.

Several Commissioners expressed support for allowing unlimited requests if dates are available and the fee is paid.

Commissioner Torres noted that businesses may seek multiple dates for visibility, suggesting that if a business is willing to pay per night, it could be allowed.

Chair Cook raised concern that allowing unlimited requests could result in businesses occupying dates that others may want to use.

Commissioner Mulcahy noted that the policy could be adjusted in the future if it becomes an issue.

The Commission generally supported allowing unlimited requests for open dates, with the understanding that the policy could be revised if needed.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares outlined options for the approval process, noting that in Eagan final approval is handled by the Public Works Director and suggesting a similar approach could be used, with requests coming directly to him for final approval. He added that while the Commission could be involved, timing constraints with the 30-day application window may make that difficult and proposed the possibility of a small internal staff group to assist in the process.

Commissioner Skar expressed concern about placing too much responsibility on one person but also noted that forming a committee could create scheduling challenges. He supported using staff discretion, such as Parks and Recreation Director Lares in coordination with Public Works and did not feel Commission review of each request was necessary.

Commissioner Stangler asked who currently manages the process, and it was noted that Parks and Recreation staff oversee programming.

Commissioner Christensen suggested using a checklist to ensure applications meet clear criteria, which could help streamline decisions and prevent misuse.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares recommended establishing a small internal group of three staff members to review requests, with at least two involved in the process and one designated to make final decisions when needed to ensure timely responses.

All Commissioners agreed with this approach.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares addressed potential restrictions, suggesting the City initially align lighting with federally recognized holidays observed by the City. He noted that individual requests would still require guidelines, like Eagan, particularly avoiding political and religious requests, while leaving some flexibility for commercial use due to the fee structure.

Commissioner Barker questioned whether Eagan restricts commercial requests.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares clarified that Eagan generally avoids commercial requests but noted the proposed policy may allow some flexibility since applicants would be paying a fee, which could function as a form of marketing.

Commissioner Mulcahy noted that religious observances were included in Eagan's policy and expressed that such observances are not inherently offensive.

Chair Cook and Commissioner Barker discussed the subjectivity of determining what constitutes religious content, noting that even widely celebrated holidays like Christmas could be considered religious depending on interpretation.

Commissioner Stangler added that many people may not associate certain colors or displays with religious observances and would not necessarily find them offensive.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares provided examples such as Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day and asked whether staff should have flexibility to include commonly recognized, non-federal "hallmark" holidays in the lighting schedule. He suggested incorporating these into the policy to avoid limitations and allow staff discretion.

Commissioners generally supported allowing staff flexibility for these types of holidays, acknowledging that nearly any display could be viewed as objectionable by someone.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares agreed and reiterated that these types of holidays are generally safe to include.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares then addressed communication methods, emphasizing the importance of accessibility. He suggested promoting the program through social media, maintaining an online application, and providing a paper option at Parks and Recreation offices for those who prefer in-person submissions.

Commissioner Stangler suggested adding a QR code on the bridge to make the application process easily accessible.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares thanked the Commission for the feedback and outlined next steps, including drafting the policy, consulting with the City Attorney, and reviewing examples from Eagan and the Lowry Avenue Bridge. He noted a draft would be brought back for review, with the option of a work session, before making a recommendation to the City Council.

Commissioner Mulcahy asked whether lighting options could include blacklight-style effects and suggested additional ideas to enhance the experience, including incorporating music or events at the bridge and using promotional materials such as drone imagery to showcase the lighting feature.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares responded that he did not believe that capability currently exists but would investigate it.

Chair Cook noted that such programming ideas could be considered separately, as they involve broader planning discussions.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares expressed appreciation for the ideas but emphasized the need to be mindful of staff capacity, noting that adding new programming may require scaling back existing events to avoid overextending staff.

Commissioner Skar asked about how community events like IGH Days are organized and whether the City leads those efforts.

Recreation Superintendent Dorsha explained that IGH Days is organized by a Community Committee made up of local businesses and residents, with the City contributing through programming, staffing, and support.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares added that the City provides significant in-kind support, including staff resources and coordination with Police and Fire, even though it does not lead the event.

Commissioner Skar suggested incorporating creative ideas such as a silent disco during IGH Days.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares acknowledged the value of such ideas but reiterated the importance of balancing innovation with staff workload, noting that new initiatives may require replacing existing programming.

## **B. Park Tour Locations**

Parks and Recreation Director Lares introduced the annual July park tour, explaining that it is a recurring PRACS opportunity to visit parks, trails, and facilities for evaluation and future planning. The tour is typically guided by staff recommendations, begins around 5 p.m., and focuses on assessing conditions and identifying potential improvements. This year, he emphasized a more collaborative approach by inviting Commissioners to share their interests and priorities before finalizing the tour route.

The commissioners contributed ideas and perspectives on what they would like to see during the tour, ranging from specific parks to broader goals such as reviewing upcoming projects and exploring lesser-known spaces.

Several commissioners shared their preferences for tour stops. Barker expressed interest in visiting Sleepy Hollow Park, while Stangler suggested including the Splash Pad with a deeper, behind-the-scenes look. Cook emphasized reviewing both planned and potential future projects, as well as visiting lesser-known parks like River Heights to generate new ideas. Mulcahy highlighted several unfamiliar parks, including Woodland Preserve, Marianna Ranch Trails, and Riverfront Park, noting interest in their size and location. Staff clarified that many of these areas are more natural, trail-based spaces with limited visibility unless explored on foot.

Staff recommendations included visiting key project sites such as Sleepy Hollow Park, Ernster Park, Salem Hills Park, Groveland Park, and Seidl's Lake, along with considering a proposed Northwest Area park property. A drive-by of the Hockey Hall of Fame site was also suggested due to its proximity and potential impact on operations. Time constraints were discussed, with the goal of balancing meaningful exploration with the number of stops.

The final park tour plan focuses on a combination of priority project locations and selected parks. Proposed stops include Ernster Park, Salem Hills Park, the Northwest Area property, and the Hockey Hall of Fame (as a drive-by), along with River Heights and Riverside. Additional locations such as Groveland Park or Heritage Village may be included if time allows, while some lesser-known parks may be limited to brief drive-bys. The overall goal is to create a well-rounded tour that highlights redevelopment efforts, future opportunities, and diverse park experiences.

## **9. ADMINISTRATIVE PRESENTATIONS**

### **A. Recreation Superintendent Update**

Recreation Superintendent Dorshak updated the Commission on the following:

- VMCC membership numbers for the first quarter are significantly higher than expected, showing a reported 240% increase. Memberships rose from 265 last year to approximately

900 by the end of March, though staff will verify accuracy due to software limitations, with a full update planned for May.

- The annual Healthy Living Fair will take place on April 15 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on the west turf. The event will feature free fitness classes, vendor booths, and resources focused on health, wellness, and financial information, primarily targeting active older adults but open to all ages.
- The fitness area hosted a March Madness challenge with 81 participants. The goal was to check in at least 20 times during March, and those who completed the challenge received a water bottle. It was one of the most well-attended activities to date.
- World Tai Chi Day will be held on April 25 from 9:30 to 11:15 a.m. in Community Room 1 at the VMCC. The event is free and open to anyone interested in trying Tai Chi.
- New security measures implemented by the National Guard began in mid-March and will continue through the end of April. Staff are stationed at the entrance to monitor access, ensure participants are part of programs, and enforce a no-bag policy in the gym, with a designated area provided for belongings.
- Summer recreation programs are now open for registration, with 362 programs being offered and 754 participants already signed up. Flyers have been distributed to students in School District 199, which is expected to increase registration in the coming weeks.
- Planning continues for the Heritage Village Park grand opening scheduled for June 17.
- Staff are actively working on the 2027 budget.
- Ongoing training and transition efforts are underway for new recreation software, including timeline development and staff preparation.
- Policies and procedures are being updated and rolled out to staff.
- Work continues on the indoor playground, including finalizing fees and preparing staff with FAQs before releasing public information, which is expected around mid-May.
- The ribbon-cutting event for the Brightside Room is scheduled for June prior to the Council meeting.

Commissioner Barker asked what factors are contributing to the significant increase in membership numbers.

Recreation Superintendent Dorshak explained that the increase in membership is likely due to a combination of factors, including strong staff performance and a welcoming, vibrant facility environment with recent updates like new paint and lobby furniture. She noted that positive customer experiences and engaging fitness programming contribute to retention and growth. She also highlighted the continued acceptance of Silver Sneakers memberships, which some other facilities no longer offer, as a significant factor. In addition, efforts to attract younger families through expanded programming and new classes, led by the fitness program supervisor, have helped broaden participation and increase overall membership.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares added that key staff hires, enhanced marketing efforts, and strong leadership across the team have contributed to the increase in membership. He noted that recent facility improvements, both visible upgrades and behind-the-scenes mechanical updates, along with strong customer service and excitement around new amenities like the indoor playground, have helped drive growth and positive recognition.

Chair Cook commented that the facility has excellent instructors across its classes, and that word of mouth about their quality encourages more people to participate, whether in group classes or individual training.

Recreation Superintendent Dorshak agreed, adding that positive customer service and people enjoying their experiences play a key role in building that word-of-mouth growth.

### **B. Parks Superintendent Update**

Parks Superintendent Swoboda updated the Commission on the following:

- Snowplows are done for the season, and parks maintenance operations are fully underway,
- Crews are repairing sod damage from plows, sweeping trails, preparing ballfields, installing bases, and conducting playground inspections.
- Irrigation systems are being activated, including at Rich Valley and Heritage Village Park, and restrooms are being reopened with water service.
- Crews are working to install pickleball and tennis nets, aiming for completion by the weekend or early next week.
- Seasonal cleanup includes removing trash revealed by melting snow and retrieving signs from lakes such as Lions and Gun Club Lake.
- Staff are moving soccer goals and installing nets across fields.
- Excavation work is ongoing in preparation for the Sleepy Hollow playground installation.
- Maintenance is needed at skating sites, including seeding and repairs.
- The crew is very busy with limited seasonal staff so far, though additional workers are starting to join,
- Ongoing tasks include meeting with vendors and ordering supplies such as paint, chalk, fertilizer, seed, and chemicals,
- Quotes are being gathered for capital improvement projects, including blacktop replacement on trails and parking lots and roof replacements at park shelters.
- Work continues at Heritage Village Park to complete remaining punch list items, with coordination meetings scheduled.
- The Sleepy Hollow playground is expected to begin construction in April, with a goal of completion by June 1.
- Planning is underway for tree replacement, including identifying locations, assessing nursery inventory, and determining additional orders.

Chair Cook acknowledged the extensive workload, noting that much of the work is essential but often goes unnoticed by the public, even though it is critical to keeping operations running smoothly behind the scenes.

Parks Superintendent Swoboda added that with 32 playgrounds and 17 ballfields, along with courts and plumbing systems, the amount of preparation and maintenance required is significant and relies on a coordinated team effort.

### **C. Parks and Recreation Director Update**

Parks and Recreation Director Lares updated the Commission on the following:

- Indoor playground construction is nearly complete, with remaining work including epoxy flooring, installation of windows and doors, punch list items, and final touches such as benches and a marquee, with completion expected by early May,
- The department is entering a busy budget season, with all staff balancing daily operations and preparations for the 2027 budget and capital improvement planning, which may result in slight delays in response times.

Commissioner Torres asked whether Snoopy would be placed on top of the playground.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares confirmed that Snoopy will be on top of the play structure. He explained that the original statue was over 550 pounds and had to be reduced to under 400 pounds. The Snoopy figure, originally donated by Willie and Mary Krech and previously displayed in a glass case at the community center, has now been placed on the playground. He added that the donors supported the modifications and will be invited to see the updated installation.

Chair Cook commented that he liked the marquee at the entrance, noting that it feels fun and welcoming.

Parks and Recreation Director Lares described the entrance layout, including large glass doors, a floor-to-ceiling window, vending machines, and other amenities. He emphasized the coordination and effort behind the project, noting that although the space was retrofitted, the investment reflects a commitment to providing a high-quality amenity for the community.

Chair Cook thanked staff for their work, noting that the effort is evident and that the space will be exciting for the community, especially for children.

#### **10. COMMISSION COMMENTS:**

Commissioner Barker expressed excitement about the upcoming Heritage Village Park grand opening, noting it has been a long time coming and encouraging people to bike or carpool.

Commissioner Mulcahy reminded everyone that Earth Day is approaching and encouraged visiting an Inver Grove Heights park.

Commissioner Skar highlighted the School District 199 Superintendent finalist interviews, emphasizing the importance of the position to the community and encouraging people to watch and provide feedback.

#### **11. ADJOURN:**

**Motion by Commissioner Skar second by Commissioner Mulcahy to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m.**

**Ayes: 8**

**Nays: 0      Motion carried.**

Minutes prepared by Recording Secretary Tammy Greenlee.